Post-Revolutionary Transitions: A Conference Report
March 31, 2011
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Executive Summary: On 14 March 2011 the Institute for National Strategic Studies in conjunction with the United States Institute for Peace held a conference to examine the process of revolution using theoretical and historical examples and applying the common patterns to the dramatic changes in many Arab states. The goal was to extract those factors that drive the process of political and social change and assess whether they can be altered to reach a positive end state. The theories included non-violent and violent historical models—France in 1789, Russia in 1917, and the 1978 Islamic revolution in Iran and a list of factors developed by Dr. Hans Binnendijk and the participants to use in assessing the prospects for a positive (i.e. moderate) outcome in Middle East countries facing popular demands for significant political and social reforms. A key question for participants was the impact of foreign intervention to secure the success of political moderates and avoid the devastation that comes with the takeover of the revolution by extremists who represent a small minority of the population and are willing to use whatever means necessary to succeed.

Several conclusions emerged:

There is no model formula for revolution. Each case and country is unique, but the solutions offered as transformative and new, and the people offering them, are similar in outlook and intent to those opposing them in the Old Regime. Very often, they are the same.

In the traditional view, moderates first acquire power but extremist elements—be they Jacobin, Bolshevik or clerical—soon seize power. The radicals succeed because they are driven by a clear and simple vision of the end state and are not afraid to use all means necessary to achieve that end. In the process, civil society is stifled, the military is dysfunctional, the opposition fragments, and radicals fill the political void. In any case, there are no guarantees of a positive outcome or that democracy will prevail in the short-term. This would seem to apply to Yemen, Libya and Iran.

Other revolutions have followed a less violent course and achieved positive results. In the past 4 decades, political revolutions have occurred on the Iberian Peninsula, in Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Balkans. These revolutions were, for the most part, peaceful, the opposition was well-organized and not dominated by anti-democratic elements, the military was part of the process, the new government was able to deliver services, civil society institutions already existed, the rule of law was established, and there was agreement on a process for national reconciliation. Tunisia and Egypt would seem to be examples of this.

Some protestors in the Middle East region seek a middle ground. Violence by the military and security forces has disrupted peaceful demonstrations, arrests and torture are commonplace, but efforts have been made to negotiate compromises which would leave the ruling family in place with limits placed on royal or republican absolutism accompanied by concessions on power sharing to elected parliaments. In this uncertain environment, radical clerics and political hard-liners are emerging to vie for public space,

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foreign intervention is a reality, and moderates may soon find themselves totally marginalized. Bahrain is the primary example.

The problems triggering the protests are long standing and systemic, but the response has a new urgency. Part of this is due to the demonstration effect—success in Tunis and Cairo encouraged individuals in other countries to emulate them. At the same time, the protestors are young, well-educated, technologically savvy, and more willing to take risks than their parents. They do not share the defeatism of their parents' generation. Arab pride is back.

Setting priorities is important if the revolution is to succeed and stabilize. Thus far, the focus has been on removing the leader and demanding accountable governance. There are, however, no real road maps and no consensus on what comes next. Is it elections first, then constitutional reform, or should the focus be on economic reform, jobs, and ending corruption? Structure and organization are key to winning the revolution—if structure is missing, then how will issues be resolved and the system stabilized.

The conference limited its case studies to those countries that in early March were already in the throes of popular protests and clear government responses—Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Iran. Syria, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Iraq, and Jordan were not included because developments had not reached a critical stage. Participants focused on identifying indicators of unrest, defining the process underway, and applying the indicators to specific case studies. Ultimately, they focused on one key question: What factors determine which path the revolution will take? Participants agreed that compromise, cooperation, and reconciliation are key to a successful and peaceful transition but appear to be missing from the current transitional debates. Generational differences, vested interests, and a reluctance of the old to make way for or share power with the rising generation could doom chances for successful and peaceful transitions.

Finally, there is a common perception that knowingly or unknowingly, U.S. policy has accelerated the revolutionary process by encouraging talk of reform and political moderation. In doing so, the United States would seem to be promoting the revolutionary process. Some observers of the Middle East region noted that the visceral reaction in the region to crisis is always to blame the Americans. We are seen as promoting reforms that would weaken friendly autocrats and at the same time, as encouraging elements opposing the status quo, especially where the status quo regime is rigid uncompromising. To this, there is no ready or simple solution.

Setting the Framework

In opening the conference, USIP President Richard Solomon observed that American policy has pleaded with authoritarian leaders for decades to allow political reform and a more open society and warned that without the growth of a responsible civil society, there is little stability on which democratic values and nonviolent change can be built. Perhaps with the fate of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in mind, none in the Middle East have responded. INSS Director Hans Binnendijk and the participants offered 9 factors which could provide metrics for a successful transition, successful meaning the non-violent transfer of power from the failed regime to one that is moderate in its politics and responsive to the public. The factors are:

The revolution is relatively peaceful.

The opposition is well organized and not dominated by radical or anti-democratic forces.

The military agrees to the establishment of civilian rule, remains intact, and has the support of the population.

The judiciary is functional, independent and credible.

The new government distances itself from the old regime, can deliver basic services, and can stabilize the economy.

Civil society forms political parties and associations to sustain the new government.

A process for future peaceful and democratic transitions of government is put in place.

External actors provide positive support at critical moments but refrain from intervening.

The new government agrees to establish a truth and reconciliation commission or process for national reconciliation.

The Revolution in Tactics

Most revolutions are viewed at their most dramatic and dangerous moments. Coverage of the recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Iran in 2009, for example, focused on violent clashes between government forces and "the street" or opposition and emphasized the role of social networks and the media in making the revolution possible. Several conference participants active in the Arab revolts denied that the tools of social networking—Facebook, Twitter, and the print media, including *al-Jazeera*—created the protests. Three questions dominated the theoretical discourse: what does history tell us about regime change, what role does the military play, and what is the likely impact of foreign intervention, however benign its intent.

Civil Resistance as Tactic. Dr. Peter Ackerman, a founder of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, spoke on civil resistance and democratic transitions. He stressed that nonviolent resistance is not nonviolence. It uses a variety of tactics, including protests, strikes, boycotts and civil disobedience, to break the power of an oppressive regime and induce defections when no other means are available. It succeeded in Egypt in 2011 because supporters of civil resistance were able to mobilize a broad coalition to challenge the regime's legitimacy and co-opt potential military repression. It failed in Iran in 2009 because military and security forces held firm and ruthlessly suppressed any signs of opposition. Ackerman cited research showing that less than 25 percent of attempted insurrections using armed struggle succeed. Social networks provide advantages in logistics and communication but are not a tactic or a strategy. Regardless of tactics, a revolution must be carefully planned, have a well-developed common vision of a new political order, maintain discipline in its ranks, and unify diverse segments of society under its banner. The latter is critical in muting or preventing repression, Ackerman concluded, because "You can't inspire defections among people you're trying to kill."

History as a Revolutionary Model. Harvard-historian Crane Brinton published what has become the classic theory of revolution in 1938. In his book *Anatomy of Revolution*, he identified specific stages in the process of revolution and detailed their common characteristics.[1] Revolutions are not made by the poor, according to Brinton. Rather, revolution begins with the government's financial break-down, the formation of an organization of discontents that makes demands that would effectively lead to the collapse of the Old Order, and efforts by the Old Regime to stamp out the opposition by force. It fails and the king, tsar, or prime minister is executed or exiled. After the revolution, the opposition splinters, and moderates, like Alexander Kerensky in Russia and Bani Sadr in Iran, come to power. They were part of the passive opposition of the Old Regime and use its machinery to resolve the problems facing the new government. They are weak leaders, lacking the discipline and ruthlessness needed to survive dangerous times. They are soon replaced by radical factions, who are fewer in number, usually middle class, educated and highly disciplined. They are willing to do whatever is necessary to win. This radical phase is accompanied by brutality, a reign of terror, and purges of which it is said, "The revolution devours its children." The reign of terror eventually burns out, the radicals are removed, and moderation of a sort returns, led by "a man on a white horse." The

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[1] Brinton focused on four revolutions: Britain's Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the American, French and Russian revolutions. He died before the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979 occurred.

general—it is usually a military man—restores the status quo ante. The revolution is over, a new Order is established, and fundamental political and social change, with the exception of the Russian revolution, has not taken place.

The Role of the Military in the Revolution. The 1979 Iranian and 2011 Egyptian revolutions highlight the impact the military can play in determining the results of a revolution. In both cases, the military was viewed, rightly or wrongly, as an important institution in legitimizing power and as modern, effective organizations. In both countries, the Old Regime was careful to bestow privileges and benefits while monitoring military leaders for political correctness. Military support—or lack thereof—was critical to the Shah's abdication and Mubarak's resignation. The Shah's micromanagement and vacillation led the Iranian armed forces to passively accept his contradictory stances on the use of violence and accept the revolution; the demands of the people in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria led the more powerful Egyptian military to force Mubarak out to save themselves and the power the armed forces still have. In Iran and Egypt social divisions separated the conscripts from the mid and senior-level officer corps, making both armies uncertain that the troops would follow orders to shoot anti-regime demonstrators.

The Islamic Republic learned an important lesson from the Shah. If you are uncertain of the loyalty and capability of the armed forces inherited from the Old Order, then create a second force to protect the new regime, the revolution and the republic. This new force—the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC)—will not be afflicted by self-doubt, will be ruthless when necessary, and will employ violence and psychological warfare to safeguard the leaders and intimidate the regular military and potential oppositionists. The Egyptian experience teaches different lessons for the Arabs in revolt today. Strong civilian leadership, popular respect and good civilian-military relations are necessary but not always sufficient to sustain good or just governance.

Impact of Foreign Intervention on the Revolution. Examination of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the People Power Revolution in the Philippines, and efforts at regime change in Latin America reveal some sobering truths about the impact of foreign intervention. Days of street demonstrations in *Kiev* resulted in a weak political compromise that promised new elections and reform, but it took a strong and well-organized opposition, a divided government party, several years of rigged elections and promises of cooperation and support from the European Union (EU) and the United States to insure a positive conclusion to what could have been a civil war fueled by competition between the police and the military services.

The so-called People's Power Revolutions in the *Philippines* in 1986 and 2001 were less a revolution than they were an exchange of one set of elites for another. No political reforms resulted and constitutional processes were missing. Said a former ambassador, "It was an exercise in getting rid of people you just don't like. Corruption had worsened. One bribe used to be given to Marco's family and now you had to give bribes up and down the chain." Support from an organized political opposition, the Catholic Church and the army were critical to the success of Cory Acquino but the system returned to the incompetency, economic protectionism, and rule by a political family dynasty similar to what existed under Ferdinand Marcos. Support from media and business interests and external actors—such as American support for Marcos to move to Hanoi—and personality politics helped establish a process for future peaceful transitions.

Transitions in *Latin America* have had several characteristics, including the primacy of politics over violence, moderation in ends and means, search for a society in which the revolution's winners and losers find a place in the sun, and institutions built by reforming existing ones, not by

building new ones on scorched earth. Using Chile as an example, the revolution that removed General Pinochet could not have succeeded without a strong national tradition in the rule of law, the active support of the Chilean military and a prepared, united front of civil society organizations that left aside the radicals, decided not to challenge the military, and agreed to postpone fights amongst themselves. The U.S. role in these transitions is uncertain. Like Egyptians, Chileans are ambiguous about the U.S. government, even though the success of their revolution was largely based on the support of U.S. civil society.

Change and Consequences

In February 2011 an educated and poor street vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire to protest his humiliation and impoverishment at the hands of the state. What began here quickly turned into massive street demonstrations in Tunis that resulted surprisingly in the exile of Tunisian President Zine Ben Ali by military and political elites determined to sacrifice their ruler to preserve their power and status. Or was it a more noble sacrifice intended to replace 4 decades of autocracy with a more democratic and open political system? Whatever the intent, the image of popular protests forcing the abdication of an autocrat and gaining at least a partial political opening encouraged people in Egypt, Mauritania, Jordan, Bahrain, Oman, Libya, Yemen and even Syria to come into the streets with their cell phones, cameras, and social network access to protest their lack of political freedom and demand reform. For most of these countries, the causes of unrest were deeply rooted in a long history of political repression, economic discrimination, corruption, and social marginalization.

What is happening in these countries is described by the elites and the people in the streets as nothing less than revolution. But what we are witnessing is very much a work in progress. In varying degree, the governments in the region are seeking ways to accommodate their critics without conceding power

and authority while their opponents see an opportunity to redress years of political and social injustice. How these revolutionary situations are resolved will depend very much on the willingness of old and new elites to agree to political compromises, the role of the military and religious institutions in defending the virtues of the old order or the just causes of the new one, and restraint by external powers who may have an urge to intervene to protect their interests or achieve a desired outcome.

Democracy as End State? Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain initially were viewed as relatively nonviolent revolutions where political and military elites appeared to be conciliatory to demands from the street and moderate solutions were possible. The rising generation, better educated than its parents and less tolerant of the political marginalization and economic and social uncertainties than their elders, protested the lack of jobs as well as their loss of personal and political independence. Analysis of the aftermath of regime change, however, strongly supports the recommendation that to sustain the transition to more open political participation, economic opportunities, and social justice, the oppositionists must do more than just remove the ruler; they must coalesce as one or several organizations, set an agenda, establish priorities, and be willing to compromise to "win." This has yet to happen in Manama or Cairo.

Several factors shaped events in *Tunisia*. Class was one factor; there were two separate protests, one working-class and rural, the other more urban and middle-class. Social networks did not make the protests happen, but they did make them happen faster, enabling the opposition to "win." Unlike most of the Arab states, the Tunisian military played a much more limited political and economic role, had a good human rights record, and a positive relationship with the U.S. military. Tunisia had become very secular and pro-woman, and as a result was considered a pariah state by many Arabs. Tunisians want democracy for the sake of jobs and the protests combined critiques of the secular

fundamentalism of the government with economics. Yet, the prospects for Tunisia are relatively positive. Leaders are emerging who have moderate goals, decent democratic credentials, and organizational skills suggest a more optimistic chance of success.

Some observers credit the pragmatism of the *Egyptian* military in removing Mubarak and not attacking the crowds in Tahrir Square with the success of a nonviolent revolution. Others say the relative peacefulness reflected Egyptians' desire for freedom and commitment to strategic non-violence. One scholar gave partial credit to the Obama administration, which he says sent word to Egypt's military leaders that the use of U.S. equipment against the Egyptian people would end American foreign aid. A participant in the events in Tahrir Square said that the internet helped set up the opposition network, but neither social networking nor the press was responsible for the events leading to the ouster of President Mubarak. That took the spread of social networking to the streets and extended family networks using them to make change happen. The army was sent to end the situation by any means necessary but the protesters supported the army and young people in the army sympathized with the protesters. The higher ranks, perhaps uncertain that the troops would obey orders, went with the lower ranks. She described the popular perception of the relationship between the military and the people as close. "Almost every family has a military officer. And the military is very powerful, so they are not hungry for money or power. The situation inside the army is not stable, but the situation between the army and the people is more stable.".

She was uncertain of the ultimate outcome in Egypt but speculated that people do not want to replace one autocracy with another, even if it is a theocracy. Most experts on Egypt do not believe the Muslim Brotherhood or other radical Islamists will highjack the revolution. Egyptians, she said, wanted a liberal democracy but, lacked leaders and noted, "Having democracy now might not be good; it must be preceded by constitutional liberalism. The protesters actually want more time." The value of social networking now was educational—cyber activists who can educate people about liberalism using the internet.

Bahrain is one example of history repeating itself. Bahrain had a parliament for a brief 2-year period in the mid-1970s, despite Saudi disapproval. In 1976 its members walked out, Shia Bahrainis demonstrated against the government, the parliament was closed, the opposition fragmented, and the military used force to end the protests. In the 1980s, the Saudis built a causeway to Bahrain, in part to facilitate the movement of troops to the island in the event of a crisis. Today, the opposition remains fragmented along sectarian lines, the government relies on an all-Sunni military force—its numbers augmented by Sunni expatriates (called mercenaries and well-trained in brutality) who are lured to the small island by promises of citizenship and good-paying jobs in security and intelligence. In addition, a GCC force comprised of 1,200 Saudi and UAE troops crossed the causeway in mid March ostensibly to protect Bahraini installations.

Attempts by moderate elements in the government and civil society (Sunni and Shia) to compromise have failed, and more hard-line Shia clerics are using the internet to get their message out, including demands for an economic blockade. They apparently see no need to compromise. Their efforts are being encouraged by prominent Shia activists in Iran and Iraq. The government uses martial law, curfews, arrests and torture to control the population. With an unyielding regime, a mercenary military, foreign intervention threatened by the neighbors, radical clerics in ascendance, and moderates with no agenda and no partners, the prospects seem bleak for a non-violent and democratic transition in Bahrain.

Autocracy as End State? Several countries—Yemen, Libya and perhaps Syria—are witnessing violent clashes between the military and civilian protestors and appear to be careening into civil war.

Whatever the outcome in *Libya* or *Syria,* the process will continue to be nasty and brutish, but not short. Neither side seems able to sustain a long-term assault against the other's stronghold; they have no a strategy for winning and no end state other than surviving. Qadhafi may be vulnerable to an internal coup from his support base, but the opposition is undisciplined, unorganized, and untrained with conflicting regional, tribal, religious and regime loyalties. There is a vague idea of popular democracy, and "the street" appointed transitional national counsel leaders. The rebels are brave and enthusiastic, but they are essentially an inchoate mob. Qadhafi has always prided himself on his ability to destroy institutions of government in order to build a more just social order. The result has been 40 years of dysfunctional government, a marginalized economy, and security forces built on mercenaries and trained for internal repression and terror. It should surprise no one that the rebels used violence first, and that regime supporters responded in kind and disproportionately. More sophisticated arms would make them more dangerous but not necessarily more effective. Whatever survives the current fighting, the rebel elements will probably not play a stabilizing role in a new government.

Libya faces several crises. Qadhafi kept the military weak and unprofessional. He destroyed the state and civil society, but the instruments of state repression have not been destroyed, the private sector is extremely weak, the oil company has not been dismantled, and the man-made river has survived. It is difficult to see who or what could replace Qadhafi. Mosques and Sufi brotherhoods are a potential alternative but religious components are divided amongst themselves. Qadhafi marginalized the tribes, but they, at least, are likely to re-emerge and joust with urban professionals and religious leaders for power. Is foreign intervention, such as the UN and NATO-imposed no fly zones, likely to end the civil war? Probably not. Libyans are extremely xenophobic, and even the Arab League must walk carefully here.

Yemen's leaders seem unable to understand the country's problems. Yemen has not recovered from years of civil war followed by the economic disaster of supporting Saddam Husayn's occupation of Kuwait in 1990. It faces a religiously-inspired insurgency in the north, a secessionist movement in the south, a resurgent al-Qaeda presence, and an economy in free-fall. Its two basic resources—oil and water—are running out, unemployment is over 50 percent, and illiteracy rates are 70 percent or higher. In addition to all these problems, mass demonstrations across the country demand that Salih must go.

The opposition to Salih is in equally difficult straits. The political parties are disorganized and ineffective, led by old and failed leaders. The military is fractured, unprofessional and divided in loyalties. Many of Salih's generals, government officials, and even his own tribe have abandoned him. Salih offers to deal with anyone and makes few demands, yet no one appears willing to play his "bribe a tribe" game anymore. If he is worried about foreign intervention, it does not show. His primary backers have been Saudi Arabia and the United States. The Saudis may have lost interest in bailing him out again, and Salih understands that U.S. aid is contingent on the war on al-Qaeda, a threat few Yemenis share with us. He has been able to push aside our democratization efforts because he believes he has captive patrons in Riyadh and Washington. If Salih goes down, as it seems he will, it will be in a violent, chaotic revolution and it could be a disaster. There appear to be few choices for the United States in Yemen but that should not mean we must support him. As one former ambassador put it, "Right now, he's our guy."

Iran is paying close attention to the Arab revolutions, all of which are taking place in predominantly Sunni-populated or Sunni-ruled countries. Iran's leaders would like to take credit for them, but it faces the detritus of its own political debacle in the 2009 presidential elections, where the government intervened to rig the election Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to a second term. Now, Iran faces its

own gap between an older generation of conservative clerics and younger one controlled by the IRGC. The gap has widened as Supreme Leader Khamenei has cracked down, and there is now a gray zone of important figures that do not side with opponents of the regime but are very dissatisfied with Khamenei. Khamenei seems to think time is on his side, and that he is the ultimate winner of the events in the Arab world. He and Ahmadinejad think this is the rebirth of Islamic civilization, and they believe Islamists will eventually prevail in these countries. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad are aware of the public criticisms of their economic policies, and unrest in possible as a result of subsidies being removed. Khamenei believes he can wait out his critics in parliament and in the streets and that ultimately the confrontations in the streets abroad will bring him domestic legitimacy.

The elements that comprise the opposition in the Arab world are present in Iran—youth, women, the secular, the educated, and the dissatisfied. They, too, believe that time is on their side and events in the Arab world will benefit them. They see the protest movements as democratic rather Islamic. They are trying to learn tactics from the Egyptians, but they fear two scenarios: the regime deploys the IRGC and a blood-bath ensues, or a total collapse leads to a blood-bath. For now, these Iranians who oppose the system prefer to want to work within the constitution.

Khamenei opposes making any concessions but his stance is polarizing society and it could place at risk the entire Islamic republic. He has removed most of his opponents, including former colleagues Ali Akhbar Hashimi-Rafsanjani and Mir Hossein Musavi. He may be hoping that foreign policy crisis will buy him time to rout all his opponents. His opposition, however, is waiting for a mistake or social disruption.

Iran is mostly an observer of the events challenging the Sunni Arab world. It would like to be seen as leading the forces of truth, justice, and the Islamic way. And some extremists would probably love to

broaden efforts to overthrow Sunni autocrats repressing poor Muslims, regardless if they are Sunni or Shia. But they are wary of the risks inherent in Persian involvement in the political dynamics publicly underway in Tunisia, Egypt, and the other Arab states. Rhetorical encouragement of the political opposition to monarchical rule, political marginalization, and ethnic and religious discrimination is one thing, but it probably buys Tehran little sympathy in the Arab world. Hizballah in Lebanon, which has gained considerable political influence and power in this fragile state, is also in a quandary. How does a movement which built its political success on sectarian rage deal with a perceived Sunni resurgence? The answer seems to be, "Very carefully."

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